

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A valve assembly comprising:

a valve body having a rotary valve member and a valve stem, said valve stem extending from said valve body;

a valve handle having a proximal end, a distal end, and a longitudinal axis, said longitudinal axis extending between said proximal and distal ends, said proximal end being directly affixed ~~connected to~~ said valve stem and said valve handle being operable to rotate said valve member between an open position and a closed position;

said valve handle distal end defining an opening that is adapted to receive a ratchet handle, and said opening being oriented generally transverse to said valve handle longitudinal axis such that said ratchet handle lies in a plane that is generally parallel to said valve handle longitudinal axis, said ratchet handle being selectively repositionable so as to establish a desired angular relationship between said valve handle longitudinal axis and said ratchet handle.

2. (Original) The valve assembly according to claim 1, wherein said opening is generally square.

3. (Original) The valve assembly according to claim 1, wherein said opening is generally hexagonal.

4. (Currently Amended) In combination, an improved valve handle and valve handle extension, said valve handle having a proximal end adapted to be affixed to a valve stem and operable to rotatably drive a valve member and a distal end selectively engageable with said valve handle extension, wherein said valve handle extension is a ratchet handle and said valve handle distal end defines an opening that receives a drive head of said ratchet handle, and wherein said opening extends in a direction that is generally transverse to a length direction of said handle, and wherein said ratchet handle is selectively repositionable so as to establish a desired angular relationship between the ratchet handle and the valve handle longitudinal axis.

5. (Currently Amended) A method for creating additional torque to free a frozen valve, wherein said valve includes a valve body receiving a rotary valve member, a valve stem extending from said rotary valve member and said valve body, and a valve handle having a proximal end directly affixed ~~connected to~~ said valve stem, a distal end remote from said valve stem, and defining a longitudinal axis extending between said proximal and distal ends, comprising the steps of:

providing an opening in the distal end of said valve handle, said opening extending in a direction transverse to said longitudinal axis and being adapted to receive a drive head of a ratchet handle;

inserting the drive head of the ratchet handle into said valve handle opening;

positioning said ratchet handle at a desired angular position relative to said

valve handle longitudinal axis, and thereby effectively extending a length of said valve handle; and,

applying force to said ratchet handle to turn said valve handle and the valve stem in a desired rotational direction.

6. (Previously Presented) The valve assembly according to claim 1, wherein said angular relationship is zero degrees.

7. (Previously Presented) The valve assembly according to claim 1, wherein said angular relationship is between zero and ninety degrees.

8. (Previously Presented) The valve assembly according to claim 4, wherein said angular relationship is zero degrees.

9. (Previously Presented) The valve assembly according to claim 4, wherein said angular relationship is between zero and ninety degrees.

10. (Previously Presented) The valve assembly according to claim 5, wherein said angular position is zero degrees.

11. (Previously Presented) The valve assembly according to claim 5, wherein said angular position is between zero and ninety degrees.